

Avraham Atijas



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IN THE PROMISED LAND
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Editor and Publisher

Avraham Atijas

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Avraham Atijas

Technical Editor

Željko Hrček

Coverage Design

Igor Hrček

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***One who hesitates will
never reach Jerusalem!***

(Jewish proverbial saying)

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

*I have already listened to some stories similar to one told in the novella **Soli and Isi in the Promised Land**, but I am sure there exist others, to me unknown stories about the people to whom immigration to their new homeland-Israel has opened the way to a new, until then unknown and inexperienced life. Whether a hazard, destiny or, for some people God's will and intention had played a role in those cases, should be left to each individual to make his own judgment. Neither should be rejected the conviction of Soli and Isi, the main personalities of this novella, that a nice miracle (for Jews it is a biblical phenomenon) had happened to them. Anyhow, their compatriots had believed in miracles for centuries, as they continue to do even today.*

A lot had happened to the Jewish people before and after they arrived in the Promised Land, situated between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. After being forced to leave that region because the Romans conquered and destroyed Jerusalem in the seventies of the first millennium of the new era, they had to continue to live abroad, in Diaspora. In the centuries that followed, Jews had been permanently and

almost systematically persecuted all over the regions they came to settle in. By the end of the fifteenth century they became victims of pogroms and expulsion from Spain, executed by the royal crown and the catholic Inquisition. This kind of events expanded throughout Europe and the Tsarist Russia, culminating during the Second World War, in which the Hitler's Nazism physically destroyed 6 million members of that ancient nation. But, in spite of all historic misfortunes that had befallen on them, Jews have continued to exist. Moreover, on the spaces of their ancient homeland, like the Phoenix from the ashes, in 1948 sprouted again a renewed Jewish state - Israel, which succeeded in turning fertile the region once covered with arid sands and rocks, finally becoming a modern and developed Mediterranean country. During the decades after its creation, to Israel have immigrated millions of those who, for various reasons, wanted to become its citizens. Immediately after WWII and especially as soon as the new state had been proclaimed, among the first ones to rush there were the Holocaust survivors. The later immigrants had some other motives as well, like economic, traditional or religious ones and in some cases they wanted to avoid the renewal of anti-Semite incidents in regions they had been living. After disintegration of the Soviet Union, at the beginning of the Nineties of the twentieth century, from there emigrated to Israel almost a million people who, following certain criteria, were Jewish (on mother's or father's side). In most of

these cases it was primarily about the economic emigration, though in a few cases to this motive should be added uncertainty for some people to continue to live there because of their Jewish origins (although the Stalin era and the Siberian gulags had been long behind them). Finally, one more important motive should not be forgotten: a desire to join members of the families already living in Israel!

In spite of a number of brutal and imposed wars Israel had to fight during 60 years from its creation against the hostile Arab neighbors, immigration to the country has not been declining. Even the new methods Arabs have introduced in their fight against Israel and its Jewish population (suicide attacks) could not dissuade people from coming and settling in their new homeland. Therefore one could ask the following, perhaps justified question: "What effectively motivated all those people, the new or the old-timer citizens of that small country, to exist and live in a state which, seemingly, could explode any moment?" For certain segments of the Israeli society, for example the religious Zionists, an answer about their motives could be found, but for the totality of the complex Israeli society the right answer is difficult to formulate. For it is not only in question a classical patriotism and love for the country. Of course, these motives do exist on a larger scale, but there are also some others, such as: defending the democratic society and the proclaimed liberties, opposing the blind Islamic fanaticism, protection of certain Jewish traditional values

and symbols, struggle for a better and richer economic life and some other incentives. If we put together all those motives, it is possible to come to a conclusion that the Israeli population, especially its Jewish part, like and wish to live and creatively perform in that country, but for them it would be more perfect to do it in peace prevailing among its own people and co-citizens, as well as to live in peace with the neighboring countries and nations.

Having all above mentioned in view, it may be possible to conclude that the Algerian Jewish woman Soli and Isaac from Bosnia, though both still under a gloomy emotion caused by the loss of their spouses, when they came to Israel, succeeded to jointly find the way out of their sad and rather dim life-tunnels. They renewed their hope and beliefs that the rest of their lives they would be able to spend together in a relative satisfaction and close to their children who also started to create their own families in the new homeland. In this way Soli and Isi had confirmed an ancient saying that people alive must stay with other alives while dead should be with dead! Nevertheless, memories, especially the nice ones of those latter, should never be entirely wiped out of our minds.

Avraham Atijas

Human life is filled with various events, good or unpleasant ones, but a man is not able to foresee some of them. However, when they happen he often cannot react on them in a right and an appropriate manner. The non-religious people try to interpret such occurrences as a stroke of incident, destiny, luck or misfortune. However, believers, the Jewish ones in particular, have no dilemma in this regard, for they say that everything on earth and in the universe had been created and still exists through the divine will and therefore a man has just to comply with it. For them there is only one thing to do: with his humble and religious way of life a man should try to make **Him** as merciful and graceful as to let him live this earthly life in a good health and in spiritual and material tranquility. After his death, man's soul would be granted with another, everlasting life, of course in paradise!

Some interesting events and turnabouts also marked the life story of Soli, a Sephardic Jewish woman originating from Algiers. In her earlier life she had been just moderately traditional, but what happened when she was fifty-something made her believe that some major

force, most probably God himself, mingled into and influenced further course of her life. This occurred when she by chance met Isaac-Isi, an Israeli man originating from Balkans, who had also experienced in his life some turning moments amazingly similar to those of Solis'.

It is known that, according to their tradition, Jews are inclined to believe in miracles. The story goes that in a number of situations during their long history, miracles have brought them improvements when they had been losing all hopes. A miracle happened to Soli and Isi in their rather advanced age, too. At least they belived in it after all what had occurred to them in that period!

Soli was born in the Algerian town Sidi-Bel-Abbes in the Sephardic family Ben Simon when the World War II had been blazing up. The town, situated 60 kilometers south of the Mediterranean port Oran, had been for many years an important fortification for the French Foreign Legion. Her father Abram, the chief accountant in the Grand Mill of master Cohen and her mother Danielle did their best to create for Soli and for her two years younger brother Michael a happy and a carefree childhood. She was educated in the French schools mostly attended by the French and non-Arab children, but Soli had some friends among a few Arab classmates as well. Surrounded by her family and amidst a large Jewish community, in her early age she had been acquainted with the tradition and history of her Sephardic ances-

tors who had settled in North Africa a couple of centuries earlier, fleeing the Spanish Inquisition. However, this had not induced young Soli to become a deeply religious person.

Unrests and riots of the Arab nationalists against the French and other non-Arab population, who lived and worked in Algiers, perturbed Soli's teens. Like other Jewish or non-Arab families, Ben Simons also had the French citizenship. In spite of that fact, the metropolitan French called them by a cynic nickname *pieds-noirs* (black feet), originally attributed to the Algerian Arabs in the initial phase of colonization of these territories by the French. Later, this mocking "title" was also attributed to the soldiers of the Foreign Legion and eventually to all other French that lived or worked in Algiers for a longer period of time.

During the fifth decade of the 20th century attacks of the Algerian nationalists on the French and other "foreigners" intensified and became more and more frequent. The ambushed assassinations or those committed openly in the town streets put in danger lives of Ben Simons and of other non-Arab population who had been living in Algiers for many generations. However, previously they had had good relations with their Arab co-citizens. As for his attitude towards politics, Abram was left-oriented and had many good friends among Arabs, especially among the workers and employees with whom he had been cooperating on the daily basis. Because of this fact

he could not understand and accept warnings coming from some good-intentioned Arabs around him that he and his family should be watchful, because they could become victims of the extreme nationalists.

By the end of the Fifties and in the beginning of the Sixties, life of the non-Arab residents in Algiers became almost unbearable. Male members of the family, father, older brother or an uncle were regularly accompanying schoolchildren to school and back home. Accompanied every day by her father or an employee from the Mill, Soli, too, had to walk back home directly from her college. There were no more promenades with her girlfriends or cousins. Before nightfall all children and adults should have already been at home. The entrance door was always locked and not opened to anyone ringing or knocking at it, unless he could previously identify himself.

In the turbulent years of early Sixties Abram had finally grasped that it would be extremely dangerous for his fifteen years old daughter to continue attending the college, which was rather far away from their home. That is why he arranged with his good acquaintance, the pharmacist Mrs. Ayash to employ Soli in her pharmacy situated next to the Mill and close to Ben Simons' flat. The girl was obviously satisfied to get an opportunity to learn something that interested her and even more, to be paid for her work. And thus Soli's apprenticeship started in the pharmaceutical business.

Two years later, in spring 1962 most of the French citizens, “the foreign colonialists” as the Arabs used to call them, wondered if they would be able to stay any more in the country in which there was no more security in the streets even in the middle of the day. Too many people had already died or had been injured, hit by the bullets fired from all sides or by the explosions of bombs planted in shops, restaurants or other public places. Day and night the non-Arab civilians were living in a psychosis of fear and suspense, wondering if they would be still alive the following day!

With a heavy heart Abram accepted orders of the French colonial authority to prepare his family for the urgent evacuation to France. However, he decided to stay in Sidi-Bel-Abbes with his old and sick mother who was stubbornly refusing to leave her home. When and if necessary (although he was not persuaded it should ever happen), he would then leave Algiers with his mother and join Danielle and their children, who at least would meanwhile be in security!

In the mid-May of that year Soli, her mother and brother, together with some of their cousins boarded a big steamship in the port of Oran, which was soon filled up with the Algerian refugees of the French nationality. Danielle took two suitcases in which she packed only clothing and shoes for herself and for her two children. Most passengers believed, as Soli’s mother did, they would come back home and

to their jobs soon, so why to be loaded with “unnecessary” stuff! Besides, she had not had much time for packing, as the order for evacuation came suddenly.

Unfortunately, their hope to return home will never be fulfilled. Moreover, two months later, Abram with his mother joined the family in France, after one of his Arab friends warned him that some of his colleagues, considered as ultra-nationalists, planned to assassinate him as soon as he comes to his office the following morning. The same afternoon Abram and the old woman were already on their way to France. He took with him only a single handbag!



The first year of life in “exile” of Ben Simon’s family, like of many other *black-feet* (pieds noirs) French who were obliged to find refuge and safe haven in their mother country, was marked by their attempt to get adapted to the newly created situation as soon as possible, in a not so friendly surrounding of the metropolitan French people. Up to that time, the most of them had had some links with France through the language, education and administration and to some extent economically, but not too much patriotically, emotionally or sentimentally. As for the employment in the new milieu, each one tried to get on in

his own way, using his family connections in France, of course if he had any.

The Ben Simons' destination was the town of Lyon, in which lived Abram's cousin, the shoe-shopkeeper. He immediately employed Danielle in his shop as a saleswoman, but for a rather miserable wage. Upon his arrival from Algiers, Abram for some time took over his cousin's bookkeeping and even worked as the cashier. In return, the boss let them live in a small flat he owned.

Having already acquired some professional experience as the auxilliary pharmaceutical *preparatory*, Soli had no difficulty to find a job in Lyon and soon started to work in doctor Daclin's pharmacy. She rented a room in a neighboring boarding house for girls, in order to avoid late going back every night to her parent's home at the other end of that big town. Besides, she had to spend all of her free time in learning and preparing for the examination in order to get the official recognition as the qualified *preparatory* in the pharmacy.

After all, one should not forget that this, almost seventeen-year-old girl had already been earning her own living!



Three years later, twenty years old Soli met Albert, a young and modest aero-tech-

nician, who also was a refugee from Algiers. Soon they got married and a year later their son Samuel was born. When four years later in their family another son – Avi was born, the couple decided to move to a suburb of the town Sent-Etienne, 60 kilometers far from Lyon. Soli easily found a job in a local pharmacy. The factory, in which Albert was working, anyhow lied near that town.

The years were passing by and life in the Soli's family looked more or less like that of a number of the French middle-class families. The elder son Samuel ended his secondary school and then went to Paris to follow the university studies. When he graduated and then got his master's degree, he settled there, got a job and married soon hereupon. In the school Avi was less successful than his brother. However, his parents discovered that their younger child had a good ear for music and therefore they enrolled him in the music school to learn the violin.

Avi finished in time his secondary musical studies at the Lyon conservatory as one of the best in his class. However, to a great surprise and disappointment of his parents, the gifted young man did not want to go on in his musical education, but stubbornly insisted that he was only interested in stringed-instrument making! All parents' efforts to make their 18 years old son forget this idea failed and they had to look for a corresponding school. Thanks

to some friends, they finally found such an institution, but only – in London!

Five years later Avi finished his vocational school in England and as the young master returned to France. As soon as he had accomplished his military service he immigrated to Israel to try his luck in the new profession.

Meanwhile, Soli too decided to test her skills but as an independent merchant. With the savings from their wages she and Albert had been putting aside for a while, Soli bought a small underwear shop, in spite of the increasing expenditures they had, especially for payment of the school fees for their children. She started her business with that merchandise quite well and it was developing more and more in the following months. However, Albert unexpectedly fell ill and few months later his health deteriorated to the point that he was obliged to stop working forever. For that reason Soli had to sell her shop so that she could entirely take care of her seriously sickened husband.

Several months later the worst had happened. One morning Albert passed away. Soli's sons came for his burial and stayed with their mother during the mourning period. Then, the bereaved widow remained alone in the flat where the happy family life had been flourishing for many years.

Such a situation could not last for a long time. Only three months after her husband's death Soli took a brave and wise decision to

change the milieu as soon as she could. Soon it happened indeed. More than a half of what she had in her well-equipped flat, she sold or distributed gratis. Then she moved to a flat she had already rented in Lyon and brought there only what she considered indispensable for her future lonely life as a widow.

Her sons had already set off on their own life paths. She knew well they would never come back home, which she took as something quite natural. Samuel worked and lived with his family in Paris and her younger son had become the Israeli citizen a year before she left her home. In Lyon she had opportunity to pay frequent or even day-to-day visits to her mum Danielle, who was also widowed a few years before. From time to time she could also meet her brother Michael who lived with his family in a suburb of Lyon. She renewed friendships with a few women she had been close with earlier, while she had been living in that town, prior to her departure for Sent-Etienne. By chance, they too lived no more with their husbands. Some of them were divorced and some became widows like herself. In any case, she had to be prepared for a new solitary life of a widow. In her mid-fifties she had absolutely neither illusion nor intention to marry once again!

Since she had earlier stopped working, Soli managed to pay her current expenditures with what she was receiving as a sort of an incomplete pension of her defunct husband. If her financial situation would aggravate, she

contemplated, she would take care of an old person or become a baby sitter from time to time. It indeed happened but only for a short period. She abandoned such kind of jobs as soon as she realized they demanded a continuous and long-term commitment, which would not permit her to fulfill her moral obligation and wish to pay visits to her sons from time to time and stay with them for a while. On the other hand, her eighty years-old mum Suzanne was a very demanding person, although in a rather good physical shape, and Soli was obliged to visit her almost every day!



Occasionally, Soli traveled to Paris to visit her son and his family, which in the meantime got a new member, Jacques, born two years after the first-born daughter Carol. In such occasions she was helping her daughter-in-law Miriam over the children, cleaning the flat and ironing heaps of laundry. She would also cook special meals, in particular those from the tasteful Algerian kitchen in which otherwise they had not so many opportunities to enjoy. She did not want to become a burden for them, especially because of the shortage of space in their small flat and therefore she was choosing time and duration to be with them just when

they really needed her. She would stay there for two to three weeks at the most!

Soli did not neglect her younger son in Israel, either. She used to visit him at least twice a year on great Jewish holidays like *Passover* (Pessah) or *Succoth* and would stay with him three weeks to one month. Under Soli's laborious hands, his rented flat in Haifa and, after having moved later to Jerusalem, the one in the Ben-Zion Street, would then become extra clean and shining. She would also wash, iron and arrange in the cupboard not only heaps of Avi's laundry, but also that of Jacob, his cohabitant in the Jerusalem flat, who was also of the French origin. She prepared every day very tasteful meals and served them on the nicely arranged dining-room table. The flat was always perfectly clean and in order. However, Soli was quite aware that it was not a place for her to live in, at least not for a longer period. It was better for her to come always back from her sons to her "basis", the rented flat in the Kay Arloing Street, situated not far from the river Saone which runs through that part of Lion parallel with Rhone and flows into it at the outskirts of the town.

Soli was persuaded that from hence she will hover a little to one son, a little to the other one, as long as the Almighty would give her strength for that and keep her alive. She had almost become convinced that she would thus spend the rest of her life.



That year Soli again came to Jerusalem to spend the holidays of *Yom Kippur* and *Succoth* with her younger son. The previous one she had been with him for *Passover* in Haifa, where he lived for some time trying hard to find the clientele and develop business in his workshop installed in one of the rooms of the small rented flat at the foot of the Mount Carmel. To his regret the business had not got off as he wanted and expected to.

For *Succoth*, Avi invited to his Haifa flat Reuben, his good acquaintance from Jerusalem, who originated from Sarajevo – Bosnia. Reuben got along pretty well with the French language, which he had learnt in the secondary school. Now he got an opportunity not only to enjoy the specialties of the Franco-Algerian Sephardic kitchen prepared by Soli (served with the *Matzoth* tablets instead of bread), but also to make conversation in French with her and Avi.

A couple of months after that visit of his mother to Haifa, Avi moved to Jerusalem to try his luck in his specific profession, as the fortune had not been too much in his favor in Haifa, the seaport town at the bottom of the Mount Carmel. Consequently, the Soli's destination of her future voyages to Israel became the holiest town of the world!

As soon as he heard that Soli arrived again to her son in Jerusalem, Reuben invited both

to have lunch with him on the second day of *Succoth*. He wanted not only to reciprocate for their hospitality of the previous year in Haifa, but also to introduce Soli to his father Isaac-Isi, who had immigrated to Israel a year before.



Since his arrival in the new homeland, Isi had been living in Reuben's rented flat. He was a widower because his Teya had left him forever a year and a half earlier, having succumbed to an incurable disease. He was approaching the age of sixty, which did not give him any opportunity to find a job in Israel. Moreover, he had no possibility to get his pension based on his long-time service rendered in Bosnia. After the war was over, the newborn state entirely became dependent on the foreign aid and donations.

Like many Jews from Sarajevo, fearing the repetition of the horrible situation which had been so disastrous for his people during the World War II, Isi ran away from his native town when he realized that the inter-ethnic quarrels were turning into a real civil war. In its outbreak, he reached somehow Belgrade, stayed there for a while and then decided to spend the rest of his life in Israel and not to come back to Bosnia any more. Soon the regional *Jewish agency* helped him to carry out his decision to emigrate.

All in all, Isi was happy to be again with his elder son. He was still deeply shaken and overwhelmed by the grief due to the loss of his wife, but nevertheless he believed he would recover in the new or “his” milieu, as he recently started to call it. He did not like the idea of going on to live his lonely life in that gloomy part of the Balkans, torn physically, spiritually and morally due to the inter-ethnic wars that started first in Slovenia, and then spread into Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. He did not believe that the untamed Balkans could be calmed down ever and forever!

At the moment he evoked some periods of the history, in which Jews, though completely innocent, had been victims of the forces of obscurity and were persecuted by them. This reinforced Isi’s conviction that his right place is there, in the country of his Jewish brethren and that it is quite normal and justified to share with them the good and the bad. He was sorry because much earlier, in his youth, he had not had enough motivation and courage to undertake such a step, which he did now, in a rather advanced age.



The first encounter between Soli and Isi took place at the lunch table in the festively decorated hut – *Succah*, which Reuben set up on the lawn in front of his dwelling. The lunch

passed in a relatively pleasant, but a little sustained atmosphere. Isi got on pretty well in French, so he had no difficulty to communicate with her and with Avi. After the meal was over they all went out for a walk not far from the house, in a still pleasant October sunshine. In Israel, after a long dry season, the first rainfalls are expected for *Succoth*. However, if it does not happen exactly in those days, there is belief that rain will certainly fall soon after the holiday. Inhabitants of that Near-Eastern country, chronically deficient in long and abundant rainfalls during the autumn and winter season, do have such a hope at that time of each year. In the period of *Succoth* the religious people use to say special prayers so that God gratify Israel with rains as soon as possible.

During their conversation Soli and Isi stated that they had passed the incredibly similar fateful moments in their lives. For example, Isi's Teya suffered from the same illness as Albert but he died only a month before her! On the other hand, his younger son Danny was a musician like Avi. The main subject of their first conversation was how diseases of their two defunct spouses had been developing and it remained almost the sole subject of their dialog till the end of Soli's visit! This in some way spoiled the mood of the religious young men Reuben and Avi, who were trying hard to preserve at least a little more solemn, if not a cheerful atmosphere.

After the lunch Soli and Isi did not meet any more, as she soon had to leave for France. Nevertheless, at that lunch they noted down their home addresses in order to exchange postcard wishes on the occasion of some important Jewish holidays. On the eve of her departure Isi phoned Soli to wish her once again a pleasant journey – *bon voyage*.



Weeks and then months were passing by and Soli and Isi turned back to their everyday lives. To her short message of congratulation for the spring holiday *Purim* he replied with the similar short and courteous wish. It seemed their relationship would continue only through the occasional exchange of such congratulations.

In fact, Isi had a good reason to forget their meetings, because soon a happy event took place, which entirely absorbed him. His son Reuben got engaged to a beautiful girl Sarah, who also originated from the Balkan region. They announced their marriage for the beginning of November. Isi, the proud and happy father, was very busy with preparations and then carrying out of the wedding.

After the religious ceremony under the canopy – *chuppah*, the bride and bridegroom, together with their families and numerous guests were entertaining and celebrating late

into the night in a luxurious Jerusalem restaurant. There an appropriate classical music was being played while dishes and drinks were abundantly served to them. Avi was among the guests as well. Soli congratulated to the new weds in a short phone conversation she had from France with Isi on the eve of the wedding day.

Immediately after the wedding, the new couple moved into the flat Reuben had hired in the Kiryat Moshe neighborhood, mostly populated by the Orthodox Jews. Sarah and Reuben indeed wanted to live in such a vicinity, close to their religious convictions and behavior. Soon Isi also changed his dwelling place and moved into another flat at the end of Katamon, a beautiful Jerusalem neighborhood. He had to spend a considerable sum of money to put in order a neglected apartment. He managed it in spite of the inadequate sum of money he had been receiving monthly from the state as a kind of the social support.

Isi's younger son Danny, who had been finishing his musical studies in Philadelphia, also wanted to immigrate to Israel as soon as he graduates. His intention will particularly be emphasized during his visit to Jerusalem on the occasion of Reuben's wedding. It is understood by itself that, after his arrival in Israel, he would stay with his father for some time until he should manage to become independent, namely to find his own way in the new milieu.

In April of the following year the young couple invited Isi for *Passover* in their hired flat in Kyriat Moshe, which he readily accepted. The traditional reading of the *Haggadah*, the mythological narrative on redemption of Jews from the Egyptian slavery and the ceremony that accompanies the *Seder* dinner lasted until after midnight. That was the reason why Isi decided to spend that night with them. During the dinner Reuben announced that the following day at noon they were all invited to have lunch with Avi in his flat situated in the same neighborhood. Then, with a bit awkward smile, he added that Soli had come again to visit her son.

Hearing this news, Isi made only a short but indifferent commentary:

“Don’t say! She has come again? Well, it’s nice of her!”

He accepted the invitation without any special emotion, but he knew the excellent cook that Soli was had obviously prepared for lunch something very tasty.

In any case he was convinced a small change of milieu would be beneficial to him.



At Avi’s home a pleasant atmosphere was established very quickly, not only because of the excellent specialties Soli had cooked, but also because of Isi’s cheerful mood. His “diplomatic”, in a way a cold politeness he had shown

towards that woman the previous year, now completely changed. Surprisingly, this time he showed an unusual interest and desire to talk to Soli as much as possible. It was obvious that she finally started to attract him thanks to her cordial smile and straightforwardness in conversation with him. The young couple and Avi also looked pleased while listening to their chat and seeing Soli and Isi in such a cheerful and good mood.

After lunch, Sarah and Reuben decided to go to their flat in order to take the afternoon rest. Avi and his cohabiting partner Jacob wanted to rest as well. However, Soli and Isi decided to go out for a walk. They tried to explain to the children they were doing it for the reason of having a "better digestion". In fact, they both felt some non-defined inner necessity to go out together as quickly as possible and stay alone for a while.

The mid-day promenade lasted almost two hours and during that time they did not stop conversation for one single moment. They wanted to tell many things and one subject succeeded another. They were mostly talking about their families, the interesting adventures with their children, especially when they had been small. Once again they wondered how incredibly similar were their life paths and destinies. They were only marginally touching the painful subject about illnesses and death of their spouses but it was far from how they had been preoccupied with at their first meet-

ing when practically all their conversation was dedicated to those events.

While chatting, Soli and Isi were looking each other straight into their eyes, keeping broad smiles on their lips. When she or he was telling something funny, both would burst into a loud, cheerful laugh. Only when in one moment Isi had a look at his wristwatch, they realized how this two-hour's walk had passed quickly! It was high time coming back to their children's flats. However, they agreed to have another rendez-vous the following morning somewhere in the downtown, in order to continue their pleasant conversation and their companionship.

While approaching his son's apartment Isi did not notice how cheerfully, like a child, he was leaping while crossing the two small streets that separated dwellings of Avi and Reuben. Before he entered the flat he had enough time to exclaim in a semi-voice:

"Say, this Soli seems quite a decent and nice woman! Why hadn't I already noticed it last year when I first met her?"

Besides, he was very happy to have managed to communicate with her in pretty good French.

When Isi came in, the young couple had already been awakened and Reuben was almost ready to go with Sarah to the neighboring synagogue. He immediately noticed that both his son and his daughter-in-law were smiling in an awkward and mysterious way. As soon as he sat down on the sofa wanting to take off

his shoes and rest a little, the outgoing Reuben told him as if by the way:

“Not only to me but to Sarah as well seem that Soli is an ideal woman in all aspects and therefore, dad, you should show much more interest for her so that you could better know each other!”

Isi did not reply. He just waved his hand indifferently and then lay down on the sofa, as if his son’s words had not impressed him at all.

As soon as the couple went out he tried to get asleep in a pleasant silence of the *Sabbath* afternoon. However, he could not have his nap. Instead, he started to think about Soli and what his son had just told him. Indeed, why shouldn’t he keep on contacts with that woman, since he felt so well in her company? And, who knows, later he could perhaps come to a conclusion that she fits him so much, that it would be worthwhile considering a deeper connection with her!?

Those thoughts had completely broken his drowsiness and wish to relax. Fifteen minutes later Isi stood up, sat at the table and prepared a very strong coffee in a large cup. Deeply sunk in his thoughts he started to drink it slowly...

As soon as Sarah and Reuben came back from the synagogue, Isi, to the great surprise of the couple, apologized for not being disposed to stay with them till the end of *Sabbath*. Few minutes later he went out and started march-

ing in the direction of his apartment, which required almost an hour walk. He believed the march would be a good opportunity to review all what had happened to him that day.

Lost in his thoughts he was very much surprised when he noticed that he had already walked into his street in Katamon and was very close to the flat.



Soli and Isi met again, this time at the bus stop, in front of the market *Mahane Yehuda*, simply called by Israelis – *souk*. Their long walk down the Jaffa Street ended in front of the *Navah* coffee restaurant. They went into that café well known by its good pastries and which was a meeting point for some immigrants from the former Yugoslavia. Surprisingly, that morning there were no guests originating from that part of the Balkans and this convened Isi very much. They took coffee and a few croissants and in a cheerful mood continued the conversation they started the previous day. From time to time, probably quite spontaneously, they would cite the cases of some of their friends who, too, had lost their spouses and made comments on their complaints about the bad sides of a solitary life in an advanced age. Both showed understanding for that sort of feelings.

They were also telling some stories about the experiences of some widowed or divorced people who got married again and by it found some satisfaction and tranquility. Both quoted some opposite cases, too, where new marital associations were unsuccessful and rapidly disintegrated, often due to a lack of readiness of one or the other partner to adapt to some habits or even to some “weaknesses” of the other side. Soli and Isi continued to mull over this subject even when they walked out of the café, till the moment they arrived at the nearest bus stop. After exchanging *bye-bye* and shaking their hands, they separated, getting into their respective buses.

The next day Soli and Isi went to the *Theatron* (theatre) hall to listen to the afternoon concert of a string quartet from Jerusalem and then they went on foot to the Isi’s flat. There they ate sandwiches, drank tea and watched the television for a while. Later in the evening he accompanied her home.

The following day they met again and made together a pleasant afternoon promenade in the Old City. To their sorrow it had to be shortened because Soli should yet prepare her luggages for the return journey to France. Her plane was sceduled to take off next morning.

On that Thursday morning Isi accompanied Soli to the *Ben Gurion* airport. Before she entered the duty-free zone they finally did what they both desired so much. They exchanged a long and a hot kiss that meant and

predicted a lot to both of them. They promised each other to exchange letters regularly. Then Isi wished Soli a farewell and they expressed to each other a “see you soon”!



Some new feelings were pouring into the souls and hearts of those two rather lonely human beings who were stepping into the autumn of their lives. The letters they were exchanging reflected such sentiments. It is true that their first letters were mostly dedicated to some general, philosophical considerations about their loneliness and aimlessness of such a lonely life.

“It is nice to be near our children”, they meditated in the same way in their letters, “but they have right to their own lives full of obligations towards their own families!”

Then, on the same subject, Soli and Isi agreed with the fact that parents and children, due to generation differences, are not always able to understand or accept opinions of the other side, which the two considered as being quite a natural phenomenon.

Later on, the “philosophic” thoughts were more and more directed towards their concrete ideas how to overcome loneliness, for example by traveling around the world, by learning some skills like painting, embroidery, art crafts or being involved in some humanitarian

activities. And then, in his further letters, Isi started to be more explicit about a possibility to marry again, but under a condition that the possible future partner be “so and so”! If somebody “third” could have read his letters and had been Soli’s friend, he would have easily recognized her in the described person. In any case, one could guess that in the description of his possible choice Soli was also able to recognize herself and probably for that reason in her letters she agreed with him, adding that she too would be ready for such a move if “someone” would be kind, tolerant, cordial and faithful to her. Now Isi could already imagine, even believe that he possessed exactly those characteristics!

Moreover, Soli could also state with pleasure that Isi was able to write in French quite nicely and almost correctly!



As it had already become habitual and expected, Soli announced her next arrival in Israel on the eve of the Jewish New Year – *Rosh-Hashana*. Isi received the news with great excitement and visible pleasure, which the intelligent persons like Sarah and Reuben noticed immediately. That day Avi also called by telephone to tell him about the date of her arrival. It was obvious that Avi too had noticed the interest they showed for each other, especially

his mother's. In each telephone conversation with him Soli was asking news about Isi.

That day had finally arrived! By the time Isi and his mother were supposed to arrive home from the airport *Ben Gurion*, Avi phoned there. He was lucky because just minutes earlier they had entered the flat. He wished her welcome – *bienvenue*, but as it was rather late he promised to come and see her next morning at ten o'clock.

When the following morning he rang at Avi's doorbell with a big bouquet of roses in his hands, it was Soli who opened the door. Instantly they embraced each other passionately and when Isi noticed that neither Avi nor his partner was at home, the embrace was "reinforced" by a long and warm kiss to which Soli, overwhelmed by pleasure, responded in a passionate way.

While they were slowly drinking coffee that she had just prepared, they again dived into a long and vivid conversation on what had happened to them in the meantime. This time they were firmly holding each other's hands as if they were two young collegians fallen in love. Quite openly they stated how much they missed each other all those past months of separation.

They spent together almost half a day and so they had enough time to reveal to each other a lot of thoughts that had been hidden somewhere in the depth of their minds and hearts and which were predicting further development of their relationship that, till recently,

they had not even dared to dream of. All what they had been writing in their letters on loneliness of persons being left by their spouses and on possibilities to get out of such a situation, now poured out through words and sentences that directly concerned themselves.

A few days later Soli and Isi agreed to get engaged while she was still in Jerusalem. Yet, they wanted to know first what their children's point of view was about it. Very soon they found out that Samuel, Avi, Reuben and Danny would be very happy if their connection becomes a permanent one. This was a good signal, "the green light" for Soli and Isi to embark on that road in a rapid pace! A couple of days later they officially announced to their closest families the date of their engagement.

At the solemn dinner in a pleasant Jerusalem restaurant chosen by Isi, he and Soli, accompanied by Avi, Reuben and Sarah celebrated that happy moment in which they officialized their decision to spend the rest of their lives united.



Only a week after their engagement Soli had to travel again to France. This time she really had many things to accomplish there. Before all, she wanted to communicate that news to her mother Danielle, her brother Michael and his family, as well as to some of her closest

friends. On her way to Lyon she would make a stopover in Paris in order to see her elder son Samuel and his wife Miriam and tell them some more details on that event, although they had already known her decision.

As soon as she arrived in Lyon she got in touch with the *Jewish Agency* asking information on proceedings for immigration to Israel. If all takes the course that she and Isi decided to follow and the end of that road would be crowned by their unification, she was ready to leave behind everything and anyone in France and join Isi forever in her new homeland!

In February Isi traveled to France just for a couple of days in order to get acquainted with Soli's family and some of her best friends. That was also an occasion for him to discuss some arrangements with her, among others to fix the date of the religious wedding and to agree about the rabbi who would marry them. Their two-day visit to Samuel in Paris, before Isi's departure for Israel, was very pleasant for both. Even more, the Soli's grandchildren Carol and Jacques immediately "fell in love" with their future *pappy*, as kids in France use to call grandpas!

Two months later Soli came again to Jerusalem. Only three days after her arrival the rabbi Shalom carried out their religious wedding under *chuppah*, in the presence of Avi, Reuben, Sarah and also Danny who arrived in Israel just for that occasion, as well as of some relatives and closest friends. After the ceremo-

ny, the fresh married couple, accompanied by the rabbi and all their guests went to a nice kosher restaurant at the Nesharim Street, to enjoy in a gala wedding lunch.



Soli stayed in the apartment of her new husband only for a month. She had to come back to France in order to settle some personal business and other commitments and obligations she left behind in Lyon. First, she had to fix with the *Jewish Agency* the departure date and to accomplish other formalities concerning her immigration to Israel, but also some administrative procedures towards the French authorities. There was another important, perhaps the most complicated task she had to carry out: in a very short time to prepare and pack all what she intended to take with her. Four years had passed since she moved from Saint-Etienne to Lyon and now, once again, she had to worry for not only the packing, but also how to get rid of the most of her property she had possessed in her Lyon flat.

While she was making preparations for the new journey to the Promised Land this time only with the one-way air ticket, Soli was obsessed by contemplations about whether, in that phase of her life her next move was a right one, to such a degree that her nights became almost sleepless.

“My God, what is expecting me in that new milieu? In fact, what kind of a man is Isi? Will he remain so kind and cordial towards me as he seemed to be all the time since I have met him? Maybe I have been launching myself into an adventure that could lead to who knows what kind of outcome?”

She tried to imagine the situation in which that idyll with Isi would last just a short time and then soon definitely come to its end. She was afraid that then she would have no other choice but to return to France and try to make up again, at least from the economic point of view. She thought it would be almost impossible to achieve it in her age. She even dared not think about the psychological consequences of such a black scenario. Those and similar thoughts haunted her day and night.

Very soon Soli will learn similar thoughts and dilemmas had also been haunting Isi and that at the end he will come to the same optimistic conclusion that everything will be all right!

In spite of such somber considerations, a certain feeling from her interior started to tell Soli that she was not wrong when she decided to get united with Isaac-Isi. Finally she got a strange persuasion that such a message came from Almighty himself and therefore she should not be worried for her future. Earlier she would call it destiny, but from now on she became more and more persuaded that *He from above* wanted and decided it! Anyway,

she felt she had really fallen in love with that man and hoped Isi loved her in the same way. So why not to believe it will remain like this in the years of their future common life, as long as God will accord it to them? Of course, she could never forget the long and happy years while being married with her Albert, but why should she make the rest of her life miserable? After all, according to the Jewish laws and tradition, she is expected to re-establish a new matrimonial unity and not remain a grieving widow – forever!



Encouraged by the optimistic conclusions of her contemplations and psychologically relieved, Soli cheerfully left for the Promised Land, towards the everlasting meeting with Isi, the man who conquered her heart.

At the *Ben Gurion* Airport, this time enormously happy and delighted, Soli threw herself into the warm and firm Isi's embrace. They had been both absolutely persuaded that from that moment on they started a new life which would grant them many happy months, probably years to come and enlighten and fill with warmth their until recently somehow lost hearts and souls. It would be the end of their solitary roaming those previous couple of years along the paths of the autumn of their lives!

To these two human beings a real miracle, in their case the good and the nice one, happened in the Promised Land. Therefore Soli and Isaac had henceforth good reason, more than they had had in the past, to believe that something or someone beyond the man's power, his reach and comprehension decides and is master of human destinies, no matter how one would call that extra-terrestrial force.



